



IN THE FIELD



“When most people think archeology, they think of big excavations in the Middle East or Europe,” says Erin Woodard, archeologist for the Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District on the Deschutes National Forest. “That’s not really what we’re doing here in the United States.”

Woodard, who began her archeology career with the U.S. Forest Service a decade ago, works to discover and preserve heritage and historical sites on Deschutes National Forest lands. As mandated by the 1966 National Historic Preservation act, all federal agencies must complete an in-depth archeological survey of any of their lands that will be used in a federally funded or permitted project. That’s where people like Woodard come in, working with a small crew to complete these surveys, as well as, disseminating the findings to the public.

The process of surveying a potential site begins by determining a specific block of land to cover. Members

of a crew, usually around five people, spread out with equal spacing between one another and perform a slow grid, in which they walk straight paths looking for signs of the past. These signs include artifacts, objects which are moveable, features, objects which are stationary, such as a cabin or marking on a tree, or modifications to the landscape. The observations are noted on a site form, on which archeologists record terrain, types and measurements of artifacts and features, materials used and current condition, as well as, whether or not the site is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Using GPS and spatial data, the team will create maps of the area, and a final



Erin Woodard

Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District Archeologist

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report with recommendations on how to proceed with the proposed project on the land so that the historical elements are best protected.

In 2005, Woodard began her Forest Service career as a seasonal archeologist on the Kaibab National Forest in Arizona. She landed the competitive position, beating out over a hundred applicants, by calling and speaking to the Forest in person, rather than relying on her online application to get her noticed. The position, her first real field job, had Woodard doing surveys ahead of prescribed burns, timber sales, range fences and special use projects.

Once the field season ended, Woodard returned to Texas, where she completed her undergraduate studies



in anthropology at the University of North Texas, while interning for a county government in geographic information systems (GIS). She returned the following field season to work for the Kaibab again, this time assigned predominantly to fires, serving as the lead archeologist on one of the Forest's larger fires.

"One of my favorite parts of the job [even today] is doing field work and working with our crews," describes Woodard, who still likes to head out surveying when she has the chance. "I also really enjoy preservation and ensuring that important features are marked so that people can see what life was like over a hundred years or more ago."

At the end of her second season, the Kaibab hired Woodard as part of the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP), allowing her to begin graduate studies at Central Washington University in natural resources with a cultural and natural component. The program exposed Woodard to a multitude of facets pertaining to resources.

"It was great to hear the perspectives from others, who were studying in different science disciplines," explains Woodard, who took courses in geography, geology, biology and a variety of other fields.

After two years in the SCEP, Woodard took a position on the Kaibab as the south zone assistant archeologist for the next four years. During this time a major emphasis of her work focused on the local tribes, working with schools, surveying, as well as, serving on the Civil Rights committee. It was also during this time in which Woodard encountered one of her favorite experiences with the Forest Service.

The archeology department took a backpacking trip into the local wilderness with a number of Hopi elders. The elders shared some of their sacred tribal sites, but also explained their perspectives on how and what should be managed across this landscape. For Woodard, the experience opened her up to new ways of approaching her work.

When Woodard made the move to the Deschutes National Forest three years ago, she continued in a similar role as that on the Kaibab. While her daily schedule always varies, she predominately works on readying new projects, responding to any damaged heritage sites, and providing public outreach to help provide awareness about archeology and local historical sites.

"My favorite part of this job is leading programs for the public," Woodard emphasizes. "I love talking with them about what archeologists do and why the work is so important. I especially love working with kids, and getting them interested in archeology."

One way Woodard connects with the public is by serving as a professional advisor to the Archeology Society of Central Oregon, an amateur archeology group. The organization, open to anyone, offers lectures on local archeological topics of interest and leads fieldtrips to the surrounding areas. Woodard helps to lead fieldtrips and offers her guidance where needed.

For Woodard, who enjoys hiking and taking trips to National Parks that have archeological features and influences, preserving the past by the best means possible is crucial.

"Working for the Forest Service, to me, means making a difference on the land and preserving it for future generations to enjoy," believes Woodard. "We want to make sure that we're respecting management guidelines and ethics, but that we're also taking into consideration the concerns of the public. We're constantly weighing what's most important to protect and how we can do that with the funds and resources we have available to us."